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GREAT BLUE HERONS *ARDEA HERODIAS* AND
MAGNIFICENT FRIGATEBIRDS *FREGATA MAGNIFICENS* FEEDING
ON YOUNG TURTLES

On 25 June 1990, on a sandy beach on the north coast of Santa Cruz Island, Galapagos Islands, Ecuador, two Great Blue Herons *Ardea herodias* were watched feeding on young Pacific Green Turtles *Chelodia mydas*. A number of these turtles had evidently laid eggs in nests situated in the low sand dune ridge at the back of the beach, and these eggs were in the process of hatching, with young turtles approximately 5 cm in length emerging from the sand and immediately heading for the sea. The two herons were some 50 m apart and both spent the period from 14.30 to 18.00 hours feeding on the young turtles. One of the herons was watched continuously for an hour and during this period it rested for a total of 11 minutes, and caught and ate a total of 9 young turtles. Casual observation of the second heron showed a similar pattern of activity. Assuming a fairly consistent feeding pattern this works out at one turtle for every 5.4 minutes of feeding activity, so the total number of turtles taken by these two birds during the afternoon must have been considerable (approximately 100). It was of interest to see that 6 of the turtles caught within the one-hour period were taken before they had emerged onto the surface of the sand, but it was not possible to ascertain whether they were first detected by sound or by the slight movement of sand grains on the surface of the dune. The prey were usually caught cross-wise in the bill and then tossed in the air until they could be swallowed head first. The taking of turtles by this species is not mentioned specifically by Bent (1926, *Life Histories of North American Marsh Birds*), Palmer (1962, *Handbook of North American Birds*, vol. 1) or Hancock & Kushlan (1984, *The Herons Handbook*).

At 1730 hours two Magnificent Frigatebirds *Fregata magnificens* arrived and spent 15 minutes hovering low over the sand and picking off young turtles that had escaped the attentions of the herons. Frigatebirds are known to catch significant numbers of newly hatched turtles on beaches.

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